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# COMMUNITY DRAMA

BY PERCY MACKAYE

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## **COMMUNITY DRAMA**





## WORKS BY PERCY MACKAYE

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*AT ALL BOOKSELLERS*



# COMMUNITY DRAMA

Its Motive and Method of  
NEIGHBORLINESS

An Interpretation

by

PERCY MACKAYE



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

The Riverside Press Cambridge

1917

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*Published June 1917*

*To*  
**P. S.**



## PREFACE

THE present essay is the substance of an address delivered by me before the American Civic Association at its annual meeting, at the Hotel Willard, Washington, D.C., December 13, 1916, Miss Margaret Woodrow Wilson presiding. At that conference of workers in the fields of public education, recreation, and community organizing, the experts there gathered expressed their very real enthusiasm for the practicability and progressiveness of the ideas which I sought to suggest for their earnest consideration.

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Those ideas — for a new method of community building, for a dynamic, coöperative means of education in community aims, for a loyalty to those aims at once spontaneous and disciplined, for a purposeful efficiency of neighborliness — apply not less, but more, since our entrance into the World War with the exalted purpose expressed by President Wilson of helping to make the world permanently “safe for democracy.”

Especially, I think, at this time they might be applied with excellent results to the inspiring task, immense in its scope and meaning, which the newly appointed Federal Commission on

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Training Camp Activities is undertaking for America. That task is to establish "a great affirmative system, instead of a merely sterile negative one," for the healthful development of our nation's young men under military conscription, as an offset to the scourging menaces of drink and sexual immorality.

Here is the opportunity for America to create a new kind of army — a new kind of community in arms for the attainment of democratic world-freedom: an army in which "the moral equivalent of war" shall be quickened and organized within the very fabric of the fighting machine itself: a fighting

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force, in which virile and wholesome *expression* through coöperative sports and arts shall be substituted for an outworn ideal of repression, and go hand in hand with effective martial discipline, not lessening but increasing its efficiency.

Besides such activities within the camps themselves as unit communities, the relationship of the camps to their environs hold important possibilities of social development.

Concerning these, one of the Federal Commissioners<sup>1</sup> writes: "A part of our work will be the promotion of harmo-

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Joseph E. Raycroft, of Princeton University, in the *New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, May 20, 1917.



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nious and beneficial relations between the camps and the neighboring towns.” To coöperate in this work, a number of agencies — such as the Y.M.C.A., the Y.W.C.A., the Red Cross, the churches — are, he says, to be counted upon “to make a new environment for the soldier when off duty, and to put life into an ideal that will strive to return him finally to his home a better man than when he left it.”

To these agencies surely there will be added the expert art of recreational expression, Community Drama.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Community Drama, as its meaning is here conceived, is of course directly bound up with the Community Music Movement, as that is being developed under the leadership

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Thus the Motive and Method suggested in this essay — the Christian motive of efficient ‘neighborliness,’ and the art method of dramatic organization — may well be directly applied to the constructive solution of an American problem, national and international in its implications.

In consonance with these ideas, the important community experiment, tried with encouraging results a year ago through the production of the

in New York of Arthur Farwell and Harry H. Barnhart. With that is also directly related the Community Centre Movement, under the leadership of John Collier, of the People’s Institute, New York, as well as many recreational activities of the Playgrounds Association, under the presidency of Joseph Lee.

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Community Masque "Caliban" in New York, is being repeated, on an even larger scale, in Boston. There, at the date of this preface, the Caliban Committee of Greater Boston are busily organizing more than seven thousand men and women for the production of "Caliban," at the Harvard Stadium, from June 28 to July 9, for the monetary benefit of the Red Cross and the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, Harvard University, and the social benefit of the whole Boston community.

To assist the purposes of the Committee, this essay is now published, for whatever service it may render to

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those community objects in Boston  
and elsewhere.

PERCY MACKAYE

BOSTON, 22 *May* 1917

## **COMMUNITY DRAMA**



# COMMUNITY DRAMA

## AN INTERPRETATION

“CAN we poor human beings never realize our quality without destruction?”

H. G. Wells asks this question in a recent volume on the war.<sup>1</sup>

And in a recent series of articles<sup>2</sup> in the “New York Times,” “a distinguished publicist,” *Cosmos*, discussing the basis of world peace, writes: —

<sup>1</sup> *Italy, France, and Britain at War*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Tenth article of the series, which has been published as a volume, *The Basis of World Peace*.

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More important than the declaration of rights and duties of nations, and more important than the machinery which may be erected to give that declaration vitality and force, is the spirit of the peoples who unite in taking these steps.

What the world is waiting for, and what it must achieve before the foundations of a durable peace are securely laid, is what President Butler has well called the International Mind — “that habit of regarding the several nations of the civilized world as friendly and coöperating equals in spreading enlightenment and culture throughout the world.”

The International Mind: in the process of achieving that, an answer may be found to the question of Wells.

Yes, the quality of human beings *can* be realized without destruction;



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but it can never be realized without imagination. It is precisely because our peace is so devoid of organized, constructive imagination, that the organized destruction of war appeals so potently to the imaginations of men, by giving scope for their qualities of spiritual heroism.

War provides a method — a drastic, compelling method — for creating the national mind. Its method is organization — for competition: the unifying of nations — against nations.

“What the world is waiting for” is a method, more excelling, for creating the international mind: a method of organization — for coöperation: the

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harmonizing of nations with nations  
— of communities with communities.  
This does not imply less nationality in  
our culture, but more civilized culture  
in our nationalism.

In approaching my subject I can  
approach it in no less a sense than a  
world sense: and I weigh carefully my  
thought when I say that “what the  
world is waiting for” is to be found, I  
believe, in the basic method of social  
service involved in Community Drama.

That method is organization — for  
coöperation; it is testable by the most  
modest beginnings, but the scope of  
its principle is vast — or it is nothing.  
And it is not — nothing. I have

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watched its seed take root in soil that seemed sterile; I have seen it take form from almost nothing, watched its portentous growth, its magical flowering, its colossal bearing of fruit and the sowing forth again of its own seed in strong fecundity.

No, the life-meaning of Community Drama is universal. It is so, because its life is very old — as old and perennially young as humanity.

Under its new guises in America it has had as yet small critical attention — very scant philosophic regard. In a world of journalism, its immediate obvious aspects, its shining banners, its spectacular color, its blare of music,

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its thousands massed in stadiums and on hillsides — these aspects indeed have received large public attention, the hectic publicity accorded to passing shows. But not yet its realities — its deep, quiet, regenerating realities. For those have chiefly concerned a few artists, and many, many plain people, mostly young people. But artists and young people, especially when they are happy in what they are doing, are seldom given to critical valuation of their actions. They are aware, often intensely aware, of a great movement on which they are borne along: but the source and the goal of their moving is vague to them.

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Then is needed the great interpreter—a searching imagination, critical, and prophetic, to clarify the meaning and purpose of this living momentum.

That is to-day what the social movement vaguely called Pageantry profoundly lacks — its authentic interpreters. In dramatics and civics a thousand routineers glut the columns of the press with their daily and weekly cleverness or platitude: but where the great tides of drama and civic life meet and mingle, to give birth to a new life-stream for human intercourse, there are still primeval silences of understanding, broken only by the voices of a few prophetic pioneers. The more

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pity for this lack of interpreters in America, for this new life-stream is one of the very arteries of our future democracy.

So it was, nearly a century ago, when the inarticulate gropings of social democracy were waiting for a synthetic expounder to blazon the philosophy and the vision of socialism. Then came Karl Marx, and now the great stream he charted has been sounded and explored by thousands, and has taken its relative place on the map of social discovery.

By analogy, what is needed to-day is a synthetic philosopher for Community Drama — one who shall con-

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structively chart its immense æsthetic and sociological meanings; a George Brandes and John Dewey in one to clarify this new-world art of democracy. Yet perhaps even more than these would be needed to identify that amorphous art with its reality — instinctive religion. For that, indeed, in essence, is what Community Drama is — the ritual of democratic religion: plastic, aspiring, playful, creative, child-like, religious instinct: the social religion of the only commandment of Christ: *neighborliness*.

For it leads to a very simple creed, this community drama — neighborliness: to love one's neighbor enough to

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discover God in him. But those who see God believe in Him. And those who believe in Him express their belief, and so they create symbols of it; but because their belief is deep with emotion, and with conflict of emotions, they create dramatic symbols — dramatic art, communal dramatic art.

And so we reach back to the old beginnings of civilized man — to the dramatic religion of early Greece, to the dance, the chanted speech, the choral song, the organized pageantry of coöperating neighbors, expressing the God in themselves.

It is the story of the folk arts of all European peoples. Our own modern



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cultures in art consist mainly in remnants and ruins of these communal folk arts, which the armored tanks of Machine Industrialism have left standing in the No Man's Land of National Competition.

In the new age before us, it is not for us, as individual archæologists, to patch and remodel those ruins; it is rather for us, as coöperating artists, to build from the ground up fresh homes and temples of the communal imagination.

I wonder if I can suggest how this applies to community drama to-day. Consider for a moment that consummation in art of the Antique World —

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the Parthenon; consider one of the consummations of the Middle Ages — the cathedral at Rheims. As a result of the competitions of the merely national mind, the cannon of the Turks have left in ruins the one, the bombs of the Prussians the other.

Now I think it has never been emphasized — at least, to point a modern moral in social art — that each of these temples (itself the perfect flowering of many human generations) was the home and holy place of — community drama. In the marble friezes of the Parthenon Phidias portrayed — what? Phases of the *dramatic rites* of his ancient community;

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on the cathedral at Rheims are sculptured — have we ever thought about it? — *actors in dramatic rituals* of a mediæval community.

These facts are not often interpreted by modern professors of drama, or by dramatic critics on Broadway; but are they not pregnant with meaning for our own to-morrow? For me at least they mean this: that the golden age of community life and art does not lie behind us, but before us—that the same colossal impulses of social art which created those perfect examples, are instincts perennially human, and may be organized again, by will and imagination, to still nobler consummations.

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So on the No Man's Land of to-day's waste, destruction and industrial anarchy, the community dramatists of to-morrow — the engineers, architects, dancers, musicians, artists, leaders of religious play — shall organize in beauty the communities of Every Man's Land.

A far cry — is it? — from that crude little pageant, last week, in the suburban slums! A far cry indeed; yet it is only a far cry that is heard by the gods. And often the gods' answer comes quickly.

In the autumn of 1913 such a far cry was called in the community of St. Louis from a little group of some

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dozen citizens. On five nights of the following May, half a million spectators, and seven thousand participants, shared there in a civic ritual of their own. "Oberammergau!" said one who sat in the audience (Mr. Ben Greet); "I can think of nothing else than Oberammergau, to compare this to." And more than two years afterward, the Mayor of St. Louis (Henry W. Kiel) telegraphed to the Caliban Committee of Greater Boston:—

The Pageant and Masque produced in Saint Louis in 1914 was of incalculable benefit to the city. The production received the hearty support of the citizens and instilled in them a new civic spirit which resulted in the adoption of

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a new city charter and the voting of bonds for the completion of our municipal bridge where similar bond issues had been refused before.

One night at that time, after the third performance, I stood talking with one of the Scotch group, recruited from all parts of the city. "A funny thing this," he said to me; "I wouldna have thought till now that those dagoes could be such damn good fellers. We're proposin' to form a permanent club — us Scotch and the dagoes and German lads — just to keep in touch and not let us forget this."

And those of twenty nationalities who sang together there in the com-

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munity chorus are still singing together — permanently organized.

After all, the International Mind needs no travel to foster it: here in America, it might be made a hardy home-product, by a sprinkling of the right soul mixture: two parts imagination, and one part patience — is a good mixture.

Neighborliness in a little town may beget the neighborliness of nations. The International Mind is the neighborly mind, though the neighborhood be but a village; but the merely national mind is the unneighborly mind, though the nation boast its hundred millions. Let me not be misunder-

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stood. Nationality is a precious thing; solidarity of national spirit is an inspiring thing; but the spirit of nationality need not be — it must not be — opposed to the spirit of humanity. Whenever it becomes so, every true patriot must — for his country's sake — rebel from it to this larger allegiance; for to serve one's country well is to help it serve the world.

The difference is between *mine* and ours. *My* country, *my* town, *my* flag, *my* culture — this attitude incarnates the very spirit of egoistic unneighborliness; but *our* country, *our* town, *our* flag, *our* culture — this spirit implies that sharing of one's own



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which recognizes the world as one community of neighbors.

But this is the very watchword of community drama. "*My* pageant" is inconceivable. "*Our* show" is the typical vernacular of every civic festival.

There is, however, this tragic defect in neighborliness, that it is likely to be slack and static, whereas its opposite tends to be dynamic and thorough.

War is the efficiency of unneighborliness. Community Drama seeks the efficiency of neighborliness. It seeks to provide — and, rightly organized, it does provide — a substitute for ineffectual goodwill in the effectual definite processes of coöperative art.

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It takes its first hints from childhood. Children are nearly always definite and coöperative. When child neighbors meet, they play together; that is, each relates himself to a community process; or if they squabble, they coöperate in groups to do so. The games of childhood, modern survivals of ancient folk art (when they have not been perverted by a spirit of military nationalism), are, then, first lessons in community drama.

“Here we go round the mulberry bush!” — not “here *I* go round,” but “*we*.” It is always “we,” among children: we small neighbors, linked hand in hand, each self-subordinated but

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definitely related, in rhythm and line and motion, to the larger, self-including circle — symbol of the world itself. The production of the “*Ædipus*” of Sophocles is but a perfect maturing of such childhood art.

So from as little and homely a thing as a “mulberry bush” we may cultivate and gather fruit of the International Mind.

And now I hope I shall not be construed as meaning that all which is needed to solve the World War is to vote a general May festival. (Such has been the fate of other comments of mine on “A Substitute for War.”)

I will add, then, rather obviously,

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that I am referring for the moment not to May festivals, nor to Central Powers and Allies, but to a natural instinct in childhood — the play instinct of neighborliness — which, if cultivated scientifically, for some generations, might well revolutionize society by extirpating the unneighborly causes of war.

But this task itself is no child's play. For to carry onward this cultivation over the borders of childhood into the leisure hours of a weary and disillusioned maturity of toiling millions — that becomes a task for expert science, the science of coöperative expression which is dramatic art; a task as vari-

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ous and universal in scope as the labors of engineering and architecture.

This science or art (which you will) has for some hundreds of years of the Traditional Drama of Modern Europe been the expert servant of Commercialism, in the task of catering amusement to the leisure chiefly of the upper and middle classes. So it has charmed and mystified the world for centuries. So it is still very busy and expert on Broadway and the Strand and in the capitals of Europe.

But now, in our twentieth century, here in America, the social workers of democracy are just beginning to see that this science of the Magician,

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whose scope includes both Harlequin and Hamlet, presents an expert method to achieve their own different end and object — the regeneration of the leisure of all classes.

Why not, then, apply it to this object? They have begun to do so, with encouraging results. Speaking simply from my own experience, as author or director or both, I have been witness to those results in at least three large-scale festival tests: the first at Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1908, the second at St. Louis, in 1914, the third at New York, in 1916 (the production of "Caliban").

Concerning these I have written

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elsewhere. To touch on their many-sidedness here is beyond my present scope. But it is significant to mention that one of the community results of "Caliban" in New York was the formation there of a permanent association of those connected with its production headed by the Mayor's committee, whose chairman, Mr. Otto H. Kahn, in launching the new association, was warmly supported by social thinkers as widely divergent as Mr. James M. Beck and Mr. Morris Hillquit.

On a smaller scale I have watched the same principles at work — notably in the application of the theatre's

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art to social service for a great national and international cause — the conservation of birds. In 1913 "Sanctuary," a bird masque, was produced some twenty miles from a railway at the bird sanctuary of Ernest Harold Baynes in the little town of Meriden, New Hampshire. Since then, that little masque has met its social-service test by definitely establishing more than a hundred bird-clubs and numerous sanctuaries throughout the States, and by enlisting the participation of over four thousand children in the masque itself.

What, then, is the psychology of this new application of the art of the thea-



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tre to social service? What spiritual change does this new method of social science achieve, or seek to achieve, in community life?

This: to construct and make permanent fresh channels for social consciousness; to convert the mentality of competition into the mentality of coöperation; to create, in every home community, habits of the International Mind.

But more than a technique of coöperation, does the method involved in Community Drama give scope for developing that "quality" in human beings, which undoubtedly is developed by the searching tests of war,

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and concerning which Sarah Bernhardt writes of the soldiers of France, who attended her dramatic performances on the battle front: —

They did not suffer in the tragedy of the play; they rose to it. They did not cry with watery tears that streamed down their faces; the tears just filled their eyes so that they could see better the great destiny of their own lives.

If the meaning of this “quality” implies the happy rendering of human souls in service to a cause infinitely larger than themselves, beneficial to the world through their own community; if it implies increased initiative, energizing of the will, the discipline of patience, the poise of self-restraint,

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the releasing growth of self-expression, and the spiritualizing ardor of self-sacrifice — yes, all of these qualities of the great “quality” heroism are as implicit in the social meaning of Community Drama as in that of war. That both seldom measure up to the full standards of their quality is as true of the one as of the other. Of Community Drama, at least, the worst that can be uttered of its failures is the stigma of flamboyant and ineffectual goodwill; whereas the reverse image of war’s heroism is unutterable brutality.

During the rehearsals of the Masque of St. Louis, the young man who en-

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acted the part of St. Louis was nearly always enthusiastically prompt. The month was May. He was a medical student. His final examinations, on which his professional career might depend, came the first of June. Yet he was never absent. One day, however, about ten minutes late, he rushed in, out of breath.

“Sorry, sir, to be late,” he said.

“What was the matter?”

“Beg pardon, sir,” he answered, “I — I got married, — I just came from the church.”

Hastening from the altar to enroll in khaki has grown common for young men in these days. This young man

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was perhaps the first to hasten from the altar to his post of discipline — in a Community Drama. Prophetically, perhaps, he may not be the last. To him, his community — a far greater concern than his private affairs, a wedding breakfast, or a doctor's degree — his community had called him. That was enough. His reply was wholly spontaneous, but it was none the less responsible, definite and disciplined. There are no court martials in community masques; personal responsibility and public opinion take their place. If St. Louis the Actor had deserted the Masque, St. Louis the City would have disowned him;

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but of course he would never have dreamed of deserting.

At the production of "Caliban" in New York, the community chorus sat concealed above the stage, wholly out of sight of the performances. After the last performance, one of the singers, whom I had never met, a shop-girl, came to me and said, with deep feeling: —

"Why has it got to end?"

"You've enjoyed seeing it?" I asked tentatively.

"Oh, seeing it; I didn't mean that," she answered. "I mean, just being in it — singing with the others."

"But not seeing it?" I asked again.

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“Oh, no, I’ve never seen it. I sing alto, and there were n’t enough altos to be spared to get off and see it. But I’ll never get over the joy of being in it as long as I live. Things are different now. It was wonderful. I wanted to thank you.”

Indeed, it was wonderful: Shut away from the show itself, with some hundreds of others, in a crowded wooden loft, not even her name in the long lists on the programme — but, singing, and “in it!” I wanted to thank *her*, but I could n’t if I’d known how. She had hurried away, weeping.

These are but two instances, out of thousands (many more poignant), of

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a kind of education in human "quality," which our educators and statesmen have too long ignored.

There is, in brief, a hardihood born of joy, as well as of pain, resulting even more in social good, provided it be submitted to the tests of social discipline. That discipline is found in art, community art, for which the art of the theatre is capable of providing the supreme method. That art itself is expertness, discipline, efficiency, organization to the *n*th power — or it is nothing. And that it is not — nothing, many hundreds of years of infinitely varied resourcefulness have given proof — behind the scenes.



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Now the time has struck for that expert art to come forth in the open — for the roof of the traditional theatre to be undomed and let in the ancient stars, for its walls to be pushed back by a million aspiring arms of the people, till the soul of the community performs its magic rites behind the scenes as splendidly as among the inspired congregators of the amphitheatre.

Outside of those traditional walls the people are surging in an amazing civic consciousness. Out of a mighty need, our people are crying out for co-operation — a valid means of coöperation — as never before; but they do not yet realize that the doors of those

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thousands of commercial playhouses, which call them nightly by millions, enticing billions of their dollars annually — that those doors lead inward to a laboratory of art, that has nothing inherently to do with commerce, the art of the theatre, which offers them an expert, scientific method of social coöperation as far in advance of the dull and bungling methods of traditional civics as the automobile out-dates the one-horse shay.

There in the art of the theatre our social workers should delay no longer to search for what they are seeking; there emphatically our organizers of pageants must look for their expert

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leaders, if the pageantry movement in America is to rise permanently to its rightful power of social regeneration, and not peter out through the failures of a glorious goodwill to be as gloriously efficient.

This cannot be emphasized too much: the art of pageantry is the art of the theatre, or it is nothing. That is why it has often seemed to be nothing, when its organizers have failed to realize the nature of what they were organizing.

That, indeed, is why I think the name itself, *Pageantry*, is misleading; for pageantry, in its right meaning, is but one phase, and not at all the most

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important phase, of this coöperative art of the theatre; and that is why I greatly prefer the name *Community Drama*, to designate both the movement and the method, which are involved in this new American relation of art to democracy.

Once realizing, then, that in this movement and method we are concerned with an expert art, we shall realize that its destiny will depend upon expert artists as community leaders. We must be no more tolerant of bad art than of bad civics, for bad art is bad sociology and bad education.

If it is to achieve its constructive

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ideals of peace, Community Drama must be organized with the permanency and trained efficiency of the regular army — for it represents the beginnings of an army of peace. It cannot be made in committees, or by committees; in its early stages, it must indeed be fostered by committees, but it can only be made by trained creative artists, expert in the art of the theatre and inspired by the spirit of the community. Only so can the art spirit inherent in every community find its authentic leadership.

These artists themselves must be social-minded; the committees must be art-minded. The artist leaders are

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the officers of the staff, under one director general; the army they lead is recruited from the community on the largest scale practicable. The committees are the volunteer citizens, who help to supply this staff and army of art with recruits, subalterns, economic supplies, production grounds, housing, etc.

For a national community drama — with the growth of this movement in the future — a national civic theatre would appropriately be responsible for the staff, and the government itself for the committees.

The multitudinous aspects — economic, artistic, sociologic — of such

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organization are not within my present compass. I have dealt, by suggestion, with a few in my book on "The Civic Theatre."<sup>1</sup> Here I can only emphasize the central thought of my subject.

*Neighborliness*: I would like to come back to that word and thought, and repeat it with the word *drama*. Neighborliness and drama, the two are so seldom encountered on Forty-second Street!

And yet, even in the commercialized world of amusement, what else is it often but the vague, lonely yearn-

<sup>1</sup> *The Civic Theatre*, Mitchell Kennerley, New York.

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ing to be neighbor to some one, which draws many idle thousands from the hotels to the playhouses, and more working thousands from homes of the poor — mothers with their knitting and children, boys with their chums, men with their cronies and sweethearts — to crowd the dim-lit caverns of the movies?

But none of these take part in — none of these create the illusions of their amusement. There in the houses of commerce is no ritual: there is merely a mute spectatorship, paid for to those who know and care nothing for that nudging, dumb aspiration to become neighbors.



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But with Community Drama, there it is otherwise. There is participation; there is creative expression; there is neighborly ritual. For community drama is nothing else than the technique of neighborliness — the art, *par excellence*, of resolving the estrangement and conflict of social elements into harmony.

Dealing with, and appealing to, groups, it is then essentially an art of symbolism: for only a symbol carries meaning in the large, to a multitude, and by a symbol only can a multitude coöperate to express an emotion in common.

Neighborliness — symbolism —

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drama: these three. In our new ritual of democracy, the last only is added to the master method of the great symbolist of Nazareth, to complement and organize for our day and race the simple message of his one social commandment.

Indeed, if the inheritance of Greek culture had permeated the race of Palestine in the days of Christ, Jesus himself must have become the mightiest of dramatists, as he was the greatest of moral symbolists; for to attain the community objects of his teaching, he could not have ignored, and the poet in him must soon have mastered, the technique of assembled mul-

## COMMUNITY DRAMA

titudes created by Æschylus and Sophocles. "The Good Samaritan," "The Casting of the First Stone," "The Things which are Cæsar's," — these might have survived to-day as the texts of dramas once chanted, danced, and acted in the people's theatres of Jerusalem — if the dramatic inheritance of Euripides had been available to Jesus.

With these things in mind, then, interpreting the essence of my subject as I see it, my ideal of community drama is this: By means of large and nobly sensuous symbolism, to harmonize the complex art inheritances of

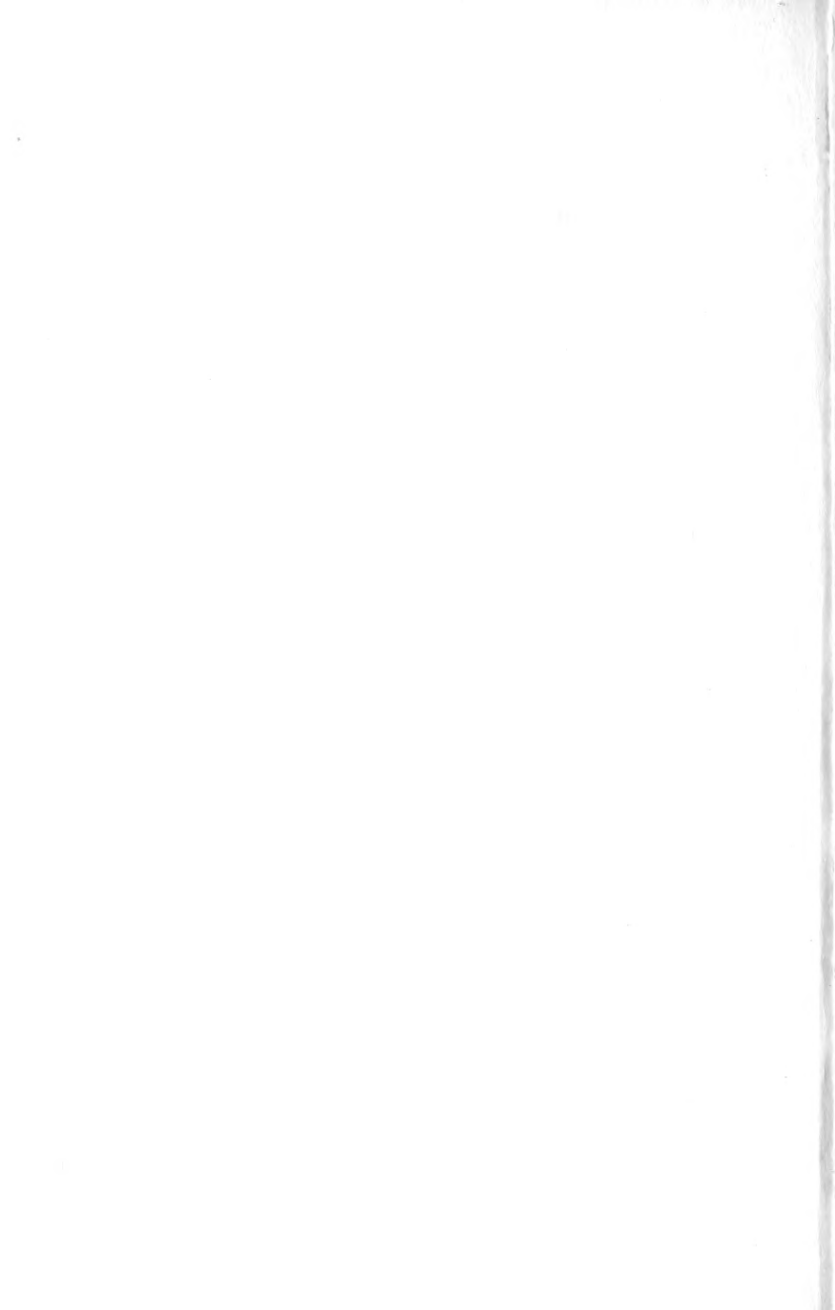
## COMMUNITY DRAMA

drama with the simplicity of Christ's social message, for the inspiration and expression of growing democracy.

In brief, splendidly and efficiently—  
to be neighbors.

THE END

## **APPENDIX**



## APPENDIX

### Some Accounts of the Production of a Community Drama

IN reference to the New York 1916 production of "Caliban," mentioned in the foregoing essay, the following excerpts from accounts of the event in the New York press at the time may be of pertinence for the reader.

New York took a long step ahead of the rest of the dramatic world last night with the presentation of Percy MacKaye's Masque, "Caliban."

Nothing quite so magnificent has ever been shown in this city or in the country. For the first time in the history of the arts of the theater it is America that has evolved a new dramatic form, as potential in its way as any of the products of modern Europe. A New York poet, aided by fellow-artists and the men, women, and children of this big and

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busy city, conceived and visualized for 15,000 spectators at a single performance a pageant drama that will accomplish but half its purpose if it fails to revolutionize the theater and dramatic art in many of its aspects. Purely as a community undertaking, the production of "Caliban" was unique.

The Masque would have been a tremendous success if all the seats in the Stadium, which had been doubled for the purpose, had remained empty.

We have seen the Russian ballet, the colorful dance drama, combining music, movement, and color; we have seen the Greek classics revived in a new manner by Granville Barker in the big outdoors; we have had an Isadora Duncan Dionysian festival indoors; we have seen the wonderful art of Joseph Urban; we have, in short, followed the new workers in the theater in all their brilliant achievements, but last night an audience saw for the first time a coördination of all these forces — a production that combined within its scope all that is best in the work of the creators of beauty in the theater. It was a true history of the arts of the theater, in which all these arts in their most improved forms were em-



## APPENDIX

ployed; yet the Masque had a form and method all its own. That is why "Caliban" is unique, and that is why its creator, Percy MacKaye, stands today as the foremost worker in the American theater, a man who cannot be ignored henceforth in recording the evolution of the art of the theater. — *Brooklyn Eagle*.

The 15,000 persons who journeyed from every corner of the city at sundown to the vast open-air theater on the Heights, found prepared for them there an extraordinary pageant, a spectacle of memorable beauty. The staggering undertaking had been carried through with no visible mishaps worth mentioning. The Masque is a success, and remains a notable achievement. It was a fine thing to have done. It is an unforgettable thing to see. — *New York Times*.

In scope, in beauty, and in large significance it fulfilled and surpassed all that had been promised for it. With almost magical effects its scenes and actions reached back into the cycles and centuries of antiquity, and voiced or visualized them for the awed thousands in the audience. Something of the majesty of

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a ceremonial entered into the enactment of this classic Masque; the multitudes participating broadened it into a carnival fête; a play it was, an epical drama, in which antiquity and modernity joined hands and danced upon the "yellow sands" of now, within the outward circle of eternity. — *New York Morning Telegraph*.

It was little less than a stroke of genius to blend a basic allegory of the human soul with the majestic movement of drama through the civilized ages.

Such an achievement is surely a foretaste of the eventful realization of the democratic ideal, when art will be made not only for the people, but also by the people, and all the people will coöperate to make the common life more beautiful until the communal life itself shall become a living work of art. — *New York American*.

The wonderful pageants of the interludes are sights never to be forgotten. No one who cares a whit for the art of the theater should fail to see this most remarkable community masque. — *New York Evening Sun*.

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The story and plot are simplicity itself.

The attendance at the "Caliban" performances at the City College Stadium raises the question of enlarging the Stadium for similar community uses in the future. That this vast shrine of athletic sports should have been rendered inadequate not by football but by the production of drama and pageantry is a curious outcome. — *New York World*.

The production proved remarkably successful for the manner in which it fulfilled its function of being a community masque, enlisting the services of people from every section of the city, geographically and socially, and in the matter of obtaining public support.

It is estimated that 135,000 persons had seen the Masque. The demand for seats had been so great that several extra performances were added. — *New York Times*.

"The most wonderful spectacle I have ever seen," said my companion as, engulfed in the crowd, we moved slowly out of the Stadium.

"Caliban: By the Yellow Sands," should be given again and again. To the stadiums and the parks of our democracy "Caliban" will, I hope, introduce a form of entertainment

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equaling in popularity and surpassing in beauty and wholesomeness the vast spectacles of the Roman Coliseum. — *Ernest Hamlin Abbott, in "The Outlook."*

And out therein the starlight at the Stadium, under the open sky and in the amphitheater, black with people, and the great arc lights flashing on the three stages of the pageant as community group after community group passed in review — the Pan-Hellenic League, the East Side Settlements, the Greenwich Villagers, the Bronx district, the schools, the representatives of all races, classes, and conditions in the great city — I saw the benignant ghost of Steele MacKaye looking down on his dream come true through his son. — *Henry E. Dixey, in "The Chicago Sunday Herald."*

It ranks in the field of spirit with the epoch-making inventions in the field of material things.

Percy MacKaye has linked the pageant ambition with an ambition no less than Hellenic — in the mood of Plato and Sophocles. — *John Collier, in "The Survey."*

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The production deserves to be recorded as a civic event of almost unexampled magnitude, achieved by the concerted effort of all classes of a great community. Mr. MacKaye has succeeded in achieving the apparently impossible. — *Clayton Hamilton, in "Vogue."*

The Masque leaves immense impressions on my mind. It is in effect inspiring, gigantic, grand. One's reflections broadly encompass a picture of the evolution of man from his brutish nature to the appreciation of the power of love in its highest by the civilization conceived by art.

Two hours or more of beautiful visions, of beautiful trysts. To many present its inspiration was akin to the good to the human soul of a great and glorious religious picture of pageant upon pageant such as no one man alone has ever seen, yet such as this old world has borne — harmonious color and movement, samplers of physique and soul, which we apprehend is man's true birthright, created by him, built upon the apprehension that something burned within him that would make him greater than the brutes!

One might take one's eyes from the pag-

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eantry without losing its effect: crescents of colors, with 18,000 human beings in full view; the blue, star-dented sky, the rays of blue, amber and gold, and pink from the lighting towers, the hush and reverent expectancy of that spellbound, multitudinous audience, a gentle breeze to fan the garments of the players into graceful folds, the ring, thunder, and echo of the actors' voices, all spoke of the potency and beauty of humanity. — *St. Clair Bayfield, in "The Stage," London.*

Aside from the sumptuousness of its actual physical representation upon the stage, there is a blinding glory in the very conception of the magnificent Masque, "Caliban," devised and written by Percy MacKaye.

The Masque is a structure of music, light, dance, acting, song, scenic values, pantomime — the whole builded into a monument of dramatic art that lifts as the apex of its upward-pushing pyramid the "spoken word." — *Review of Reviews.*

There is now no longer any question that Mr. MacKaye's conception of community art is established in America. — *The New Republic.*

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In the bowl of the Stadium of the City College of New York, lighted with the glare of powerful lights, an audience of 15,000 people gathered last night to see Percy MacKaye's Shakespeare Masque, the largest dramatic representation ever given in this city. For hours before "Caliban: By the Yellow Sands" began crowds poured from the subway, drove up in automobiles, and arrived on busses, filling the streets and filing slowly into the great open-air theater. They came from all parts of the city, from the East Side and West Side, and some even from Boston and Philadelphia. Clouds had lifted, revealing a clear, star-lit night.

Slowly the white of the Stadium and the gleam of the scaffolding disappeared as black figures took their places, until the amphitheater was filled with a huge crowd, expectant, motionless. — *New York Evening Post*.

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Music by ARTHUR FARWELL

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